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ABSTRACT

This booklet, which was produced as a follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, examines the need to establish a global community of adult learning through information, documentation, and development of a network of networks. Among the topics discussed are the following: issues and challenges emerging from uneven distribution of adult education documentation and resources in industrialized and developing countries and by geographical region (the knowledge explosion, the problem of uneven access, and the diversified nature of information); strategies for improving communication between centers; the complementary nature of electronic and conventional approaches to information dissemination; the need to strengthen collection of unpublished research papers and reports from all countries; ways of linking information dissemination and policymaking; and the role of adult learning information and documentation specialists. Concluding the booklet are the following: (1) a list of the agencies/organizations represented on the steering committee formed to guide the development of a global network of information and documentation centers that would counteract current imbalances in the collection and dissemination of literature/media and information on adult learning in different regions; and (2) suggestions for facilitating global exchange of information and documentation. (MN)

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A series of 29 booklets documenting workshops held at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education

2c A network of networks

Global community of adult learning through information and documentation: developing a network of networks

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This publication has been produced by the UNESCO Institute for Education within the context of the follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in Hamburg in 1997.

Readers are reminded that the points of view, selection of facts, and the opinions expressed in the booklets are those that were raised by panellists, speakers and participants during the workshop sessions and therefore do not necessarily coincide with official positions of the UNESCO or of the UNESCO Institute for Education Hamburg. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the UNESCO Secretariat concerning the legal status of any country or territory, or its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of the frontiers of any country or territory.

Theme 2: Improving conditions and quality of adult learning
Booklets under this theme:

2a Universities and the future of adult learning
2b The multiplicity of research on 'Learning for All', a key for the 21st century
2c Global community of adult learning through information and documentation: developing a network of networks
2d Monitoring adult learning for knowledge-based policy-making
2e The politics and policies of the education of adults in a globally transforming society

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Foreword

In July 1997 the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg, organised by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education, the agency's specialist centre on adult learning policy and research. Approximately 1500 delegates attended from all regions of the world, with representatives of 140 member states and some 400 NGOs. In addition to the work of the commissions and plenary which debated the official documents of the Conference The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, there were 33 workshops organised around the themes and sub-themes of the Conference.

As part of its CONFINTEA follow-up strategy, the UNESCO Institute for Education has produced this series of 29 booklets based on the presentations and discussions held during the Conference. The recordings of all the workshops were transcribed and synthesized over one year, edited, and then formatted and designed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this process. Linda King, coordinator of the monitoring and information strategy for CONFINTEA, was responsible for overseeing the whole process. Madhu Singh, senior research specialist at UIE, undertook the mammoth task of writing almost all the booklets based on an analysis of the sessions. She was helped in the later stages by Gonzalo Retamal, Uta Papen and Linda King. Christopher McIntosh was technical editor, Matthew Partridge designed the layout and Janna Lowrey was both transcriber and translator.

The booklets are intended to draw out the central issues and concerns of each of the CONFINTEA workshops. They are the memory of an event that marked an important watershed in the field of adult learning. We hope that they will be of use both to those who were able to attend CONFINTEA V and those who were not. We look forward to your comments, feedback and continuing collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education.

Paul Bélanger,
Director, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg
and Secretary General of CONFINTEA

Global community of adult learning through information and documentation: developing a network of networks

Introduction

In spite of the explosion of knowledge and new media, adult education documentation and information services remain inaccessible to many people. There is very uneven access to many kinds of information and documentation for researchers, policy makers, community groups, business, adult learners, educators of adults and all those engaged in lifelong learning around the world. There is also very uneven input into adult education data banks. Most of the larger adult education documentation centres, located in Western Europe and North America, collect, analyse and disseminate predominantly mainstream knowledge without reaching to the indigenous and grassroots literature/media.

In many parts of the world resources of adult education documentation are seldom available, and many documentation services are threatened by financial cuts. Yet, the demand for new skills and adult learning is accompanied by an increasing demand for adult education documentation and information. However, no single documentation and information centre or network is able to satisfy existing information needs as well as to cope with the growing need to recognise diversity in cultural and linguistic information.

In the last couple of years, however, many centres have started networking in the field of adult education documentation or geographical region. Sharing of resources and international co-operation is a necessity and a challenge.

The Workshop on "Global Community of Adult Education through Information and Documentation" coordinated by the UNESCO Institute for Education and chaired by Terrance Keenan, Syracuse University Library, featured presentations by Martha Nghidengua, Rössing Foundation, Namibia; Eva Kupidura, International Council for Adult Education (ICAE); Rosalie Ndejuru, Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine (CDEACF); Alfredo Rojas, for REDUC, a Latin American Network; Susan Imel, Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education (ERIC); Justin Ellis, Ministry of Education and Culture, Namibia; Zoran Jelenc, Slovene Adult Education Centre; Judith Kalman, Departamento de Investigaciones Educativas, Mexico; Agneta Lind, Swedish Development Agency (SIDA); Shigeru Aoyagi, Asian Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU); Lucien Bosselaers, European Association for Education for Adults and Flemish Centre for Adult Education; Abdulaziz Al Sunbul, ALECSO, a Pan-Arab organisation based in Tunisia; Heribert Hinzen, German Adult Education Association (DVV).

What emerged from the workshop was the need for correcting the uneven distribution of documentation centres and of networking and promoting the flow of information between both industrialised and developing countries, from South to North, from East to West and vice versa. The workshop unanimously supported the idea of developing a global network of networks, in which the UNESCO Institute for Education is playing a leading role.

The issues and the challenges

Knowledge explosion and uneven access

The growing demand for adult learning in all sectors of economic, social and cultural development has resulted in an information explosion on adult learning. In addition documentation on adult learning is being produced in many languages throughout the world. And it is the challenge of documentation services to facilitate the dissemination of these at different levels. Electronic information sources are expanding and there have also been developments in how these sources can be accessed through a variety of information providers.

> "I discovered that there was a lot of interesting and useful documentation in Spanish, Portugese and French which was not available in English, and, therefore, was seldom referred to in Anglophone publications and documents. There is an obvious need for translations and dissemination."
> Agneta Lind, SIDA

However, access to adult education documentation and information remains limited. Educational efforts are unnecessarily duplicated because of lack of timely access to information about the work of counterparts in other parts of the world.

Diversified nature of information

Another challenge lies in the broad definition of adult learning and the diversified nature of information sources. One centre alone cannot cope with the increasing and multi-faceted demand for information. Better linkages need to be developed among existing information providers, and new centres need to be created in under-served regions.

Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine (CDEACF) in Montreal.

- has publications, newsletters, bibliographies, directories serving community groups, women's organisations, training institutions, governmental institutions and literacy groups;
- networks with women's groups in 30 countries;
- there are 256 working groups working on information and documentation on topics including: lifelong learning, international solidarity, popular education, literacy, feminism, inter-cultural education, social development, community development and, information technology;
- organises workshops;
- maintains an active electronic network of women's groups;
- moderates discussion groups on major policy documents.

Improving communication between centres

Few information sources can even attempt to cover all the many fields of adult learning. To supplement their own resources they need partnerships with other complementary services, connecting with them through conventional methods or new electronic media.

There are many documentation centres on adult learning in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America and the Caribbean. Often, however, these centres operate in isolation from one another.

> "In the 1980s, in Sierra Leone, a number of projects on which we worked in the collection of traditional stories and songs as well as on indigenous learning and training were documented on radio and video cassettes as well as in written form. However, access to these documents now is very difficult due to the military and political struggle in the country. One question we must answer as researchers and documentalists is how to surmount the problems of unrest in certain regions of the world? How to talk about the Internet and networks in the face of no electricity or tele-communications?"
> Heribert Hinzen, DVV

In the development of the network of networks it is necessary to keep in mind that there are many centres that lack access to the technology necessary to participate. Another issue is the question of language in developing a network of networks. Many centres collect information in different languages. The challenge is to preserve this practice while enabling communication among cooperating partners.

The network of networks needs to be built up at different levels: at the national level, at the regional and finally at the international level.

The overall objectives of networking of documentation centres and databases are to meet the demands in the growth of adult learning, to work towards a better cooperation and exchange of ideas and towards the multi-directional flow of information between researchers and policy-makers to enable a better dissemination of knowledge for informed policy-making worldwide.

The complementarity between electronic and conventional approaches

In the age of the computer chip and the Internet, much emphasis is placed on the need for access to electronic information. However, information is not equitably distributed, nor is it always appropriate. Access to books and other conventional information sources therefore remains crucial.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education in Columbus, Ohio

- ERIC provides electronic access to practically every major article published in the field of adult education in the US as well as to much material from elsewhere;
- its functions are building the database, providing user services, and knowledge synthesis – the preparation of publications which are a synthesis of collected materials and are available on their WEB Site, as well as in print and on electronic mail.

In Mexico, for example, there is a wide variety of potential users of information. Those who tend to have easy access to electronic information systems are researchers, curriculum designers, technical teams and policy makers, because it is within the universities and government agencies that the infrastructure of modern information technology is being built up. On the other hand, literacy trainers and adult educators rarely have access to electronic information. For them it is important to secure distribution of other forms of documentation such as print materials and, in some cases, video or television.

Documentation and research

Research in adult learning is an important input for documentation centres and data bases. The collection of data has to become more cross-sectoral and inter-disciplinary and has to tap all relevant sources. There is a need to strengthen the collection of unpublished reports and papers from all countries, as well as documents that have not been systematically disseminated, and to translate or synthesise them in many languages.

REDUC, Latin American Information Network for Education in Santiago, Chile

- Assists in relating educational research results to policy making through dissemination and training.
- Produces electronic educational materials for training policy-makers.
- Publishes research summaries.
- Maintains a database of abstracts.
- Operates 17 retrieval centres to collect information for a central database.

Linking information dissemination and policy making

How can documentation and information be made available to policy makers? How can research, documentation and policy making be linked? These are the major challenges facing documentation services.

> "'Reinventing the wheel' is a common trap that grassroots educators and organisations designing educational programmes fall into. Unaware of counterparts elsewhere in the world that have already designed similar programmes, they fall prey to repeating the same process all over again. If they had timely access to information about the work of their counterparts, a great deal of time, energy and resources could be saved and put towards other priorities for mutual benefit."
> Eva Kupidura, ICAE

In spite of the difficulties, there are many examples of documentation and information services having been useful for policy formulations, as well as for analysis and critique of educational policies. The big challenge is to be able to identify those moments when information makes a key difference in policy through being accurately synthesized and circulated at the right moment. Documentation specialists have an important role in the brokerage of information. They help officials in ministries to analyse and formulate policies from research findings. Information workshops on the most important findings of adult education research also provide useful information to decision-makers.

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The role of the adult learning information and documentation specialist

Librarians and documentalists are becoming very active in producing documentation and focusing on key issues. Consequently their role is changing. They have become:

- documentation specialists on adult learning;
- more informed about policies and issues in their countries;
- more informed about the available facilities or technologies;
- producers of information kits for social partners;
- active members of cultural networks.

Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) and UNESCO PROAP have developed diverse materials from 18 countries dealing with:

- women's empowerment, sanitation, health education, and income generation;
- literacy rates and figures;
- literacy organisations;
- non-formal education curriculum;
- literacy publications;
- literacy glossary ;
- information on donors;
- successful strategies used in working with indigenous people, respecting peoples' cultures, languages and traditions;
- information about activities being done at the local level.

Objectives:

- to facilitate an understanding of the literacy situation in Asia and the Pacific at a glance at all levels;
- to provide up-to-date key data for decision-making by governments, NGOs and international agencies;
- to share innovative literacy materials and strategies with universities, researches and students and with media covering literacy and development

Recommendations

A concrete outcome of the workshop was the creation of a global network of information and documentation centres on adult learning, a "network of networks", the objective of which is to map and counteract the current imbalance in collection and dissemination of literature/media and information on adult learning in the different regions of the world. During this workshop, an international steering committee was formed with members representing institutions such as:

- UNESCO Headquarters
- International Bureau of Education
- International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)
- World Bank
- Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine (Montreal)
- Syracuse University Library and Archives
- Slovene Adult Education Centre
- ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education
- ALICE (the European Union Information Bank on Non-formal Adult Education in Europe)
- Rössing Foundation (Namibia);
- Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU)
- Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE)
- REDUC (Latin America)
- Damascus University, Syria
- Ministry of Education of Nepal

These documentation and information services, big and small, non-governmental, governmental and academic, from the South and the North, represent the whole spectrum of adult education work. Some of them already have experience in networking. All of them are convinced that transnational networking is a necessity in times of globalisation of knowledge and global cuts in finance and human resources.

The aim of the steering committee is to develop a long-term orientation and implementation of the network of networks, including organisation, structure, sharing of responsibilities, financing, initiating ideas and activities to establish centres, promoting access to information via new technology, overcoming cultural and communication barriers. It was agreed that surveying the adult education documentation and information scene should be the first step.

Other important suggestions that emerged from the workshop were:

- to contribute to a multi-lingual dissemination of information by increasing the number of languages available;
- to produce more documentation in local languages;
- to create a balance between regional and international databases;
- to provide conventional exchange possibilities for those documentation and information services that lack access to technological infrastructure;
- to agree on a compatible indexing format;
- to address the diversity of languages, cultures, traditions, and user profiles.

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The CONFINTEA logo, designed by Michael Smitheram of Australia, represents the lines on the palm of a hand. These lines are universal and yet different for each subject. They celebrate cultural diversity and the joy of learning.

Theme 2

Improving conditions and quality of adult learning

Booklets under this theme:

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